

# King County

## Tobacco Prevention & Control

Community  
Spring 2009 UPDATE

Public Health  
Seattle & King County 

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#### **Smoke-free housing**

Do you want to live in a smoke filled room?

#### **King County featured in NPR story**

*All Things Considered* highlights cessation efforts in King County.

#### **Millions of dollars saved by preventing youth access to tobacco**

Compliance checks save money and improve health.

#### **Graph: Did you know?**

The surprising relationship between smoking rates and income levels.

#### **Legislative update**

A review of tobacco-related bills currently in the Washington State Legislature.

## **Smoke-free housing wanted by many, harder to get for some.**

*by Sarah Ross-Viles*

### **SMOKE INVASION**

When Mary inherited a condominium unit from her mother, it was her chance to create a home free from the pollution and chemicals that had been a life-long threat to her because of asthma and other respiratory illnesses. She bought hypo-allergenic cleaning products and a special mattress, and took care not to bring in contamination from outside. As a result, she was able to stop taking daily medications, and her health steadily improved.

When Mary called the Tobacco Prevention Program at Public Health five years later, her health was plummeting in the opposite direction. The new owner of the unit next door smoked next to an air vent to Mary's unit, and it was ruining her life. She was sleeping on an air mattress in her living room to try to get away from the

smoke in her bedroom. Even so, she needed to make repeat visits to her physician, an allergist, and a homeopathic doctor and was back to taking the old daily medications, plus two new ones.

Despite Mary's pleas, the neighbor continued to smoke, and the condo board didn't intervene.

Calls like Mary's regularly light up the Tobacco Prevention Program's phones.



Our email: [tobacco.prevention@kingcounty.gov](mailto:tobacco.prevention@kingcounty.gov)  
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## **(Continued)**

### **DEMAND FOR CLEAN AIR HOUSING**

In November 2005, Seattle voters adopted a smoking ban for public places and work settings. A side-effect of the law was that King County residents wanted to be free from secondhand smoke in their homes as they were in public and at work. Phone calls about smoke drift from neighbors dramatically increased, especially from tenants in multi-unit housing.

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As the call volume went up, the Tobacco Prevention Program decided to further understand the magnitude of the problem. It contracted the Gilmore Research Group to survey renters in buildings with two or more units about their experiences with smoke. The survey was conducted in 2008 with a random sample of King County phone numbers. The survey reached 500 multi-unit housing renters.

Key findings from the survey:

- 83 percent of renters reported they had personal household rules that prohibited themselves, family, and guests from smoking in their unit.
- One in three renters lived in buildings where smoking was not allowed in all the units by property management.
- One in five renters said they experienced secondhand smoke in their homes multiple times per week. For half of these people, it was an everyday occurrence.
- Respondents who lived in buildings where property management had not set rules prohibiting smoking were also more likely to experience secondhand smoke. These people were more likely to live in south King County, to report unemployment, and not to have graduated from college.

The Tobacco Prevention Program is using this information to strategically direct efforts to increase smoke-free housing, including outreach to landlords and property managers. In 2008, the program provided education to over 300 housing decision-makers about the demand for smoke-free housing and the benefits of a non-smoking policy.

**ASSISTANCE FOR TENANTS**

Along with creating more smoke-free housing, helping tenants get away from secondhand smoke is another key component of the Tobacco Prevention Program's work. The program is developing tenant outreach that will encourage everyone to ask about the smoking policy of a unit before they sign a lease.

For tenants already in a unit that has secondhand smoke drifting in, the program offers one-on-one assistance. This includes:

- Providing strategies for talking with neighbors,
- Informing landlords and condo boards about their rights to prohibit smoking on the property, and the benefits of going smoke-free,
- And as a stop-gap measure, helping people suffering from second-hand smoke with tips to temporarily lessen the impact.

**PROTECTION FOR EVERYONE**

Unfortunately, most of the tenants calling the program, like Mary, have limited resources for housing and are facing steep declines in health that complicate their entire lives. If a landlord or condo board is not ready to introduce a non-smoking policy, they can be stuck breathing dangerous smoke in their home.

Some tenants have legal solutions. Because of her medical history, Mary's case may qualify for the Fair Housing Act — which grants equal access to housing for people with disabilities. The Tobacco Prevention Program

helped Mary report her case to the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD), the agency that decides Fair Housing cases and could ask her condo board to provide a reasonable accommodation so she can safely live in her unit.

However, not every caller to the program is eligible for help under the Fair Housing Act, and for every caller that reaches the Tobacco Prevention Program, many more people continue to experience smoke drift without knowing how to take action. The program will continue to educate landlords and property managers about the issue as well as investigate remedies that would create the option of non-smoking housing for everyone.

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Paul Zemann is a Health Educator in the Tobacco Prevention Program at Public Health — Seattle & King County. For more information, contact him at [Paul.Zemann@kingcounty.gov](mailto:Paul.Zemann@kingcounty.gov) or (206) 296-7613.

## **King County Tobacco Control featured in National Public Radio story**

*by Paul Zemann*

Last November, National Public Radio (NPR) aired a series about tobacco control on the national show *All Things Considered*, coinciding with the 10-year anniversary of the Tobacco Master Settlement Agreement (MSA) and a recent Centers for Disease Control (CDC) report showing the lowest U.S. smoking prevalence in years.

King County was featured as an example of a community that has used tobacco settlement money wisely in the first piece of the series, "States' Use Of Tobacco Money Varies Widely". Debbie Elliot, the series reporter, profiled a King County project with Head Start and Early Childhood Education Assistance Programs, the federal and state government-sponsored pre-schools for low-income families. With Public Health's help, the twelve pre-school programs have included smoking cessation assistance, secondhand smoke reduction, and asthma prevention into the services offered to families.

The story also highlighted the work of Elaine Ishihara, director of the state's Asian Pacific Islander Coalition Against Tobacco, a partner of Public Health's Tobacco Prevention Program. Ishihara discussed the challenges her organization faces in reducing tobacco use in diverse, multilingual groups in Washington.

While the MSA has changed the way tobacco companies operate, many states have chosen to not spend adequate MSA funds on tobacco control, and tobacco remains the leading cause of death in the U.S.

To listen to the story or read a transcript, go to: <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=97081916>

*Story adapted from information at Tobacco Technical Assistance Consortium.*

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Fel Pajimula is a Youth Access Coordinator in the Tobacco Prevention Program at Public Health — Seattle & King County. For compliance check results specific to your city or other information, contact him at [Fel.Pajimula@kingcounty.gov](mailto:Fel.Pajimula@kingcounty.gov) or (206) 296-7613.

## **Millions of Dollars by Preventing Youth Access to Tobacco**

*by Fel Pajimula*

Did you know that almost 90 percent of adult smokers began using tobacco at or before age 18? Youth obtain tobacco from many sources, including family and friends. Fourteen percent of youth who smoke report buying tobacco illegally at stores.

For the Tobacco Prevention Program, the benefits of decreasing illegal sales to youth are twofold; stop youth from accessing a deadly product that causes lifelong addiction and keep federal money for substance abuse prevention in Washington State. The federal Synar Act ties reports of sales to minors to federal funding allocated to states.

Providing education and enforcement on Washington's youth access laws are a staple of keeping compliance rates — the rate of retailers refusing to sell tobacco to minors — low. Every year the Tobacco Prevention Program conducts compliance checks at 1000 tobacco retailers. Over the past eight years the compliance rate in King County has been 92 percent.

Of the one thousand yearly checks, two hundred are required by the Synar Act to monitor the percentage of tobacco retailers in a year who make illegal sales to youth. The additional 800 checks are part of the program's strategy to reach a large portion of King County's tobacco retailers with education and to identify retailers who are breaking the law. These additional compliance checks in the County lead to a higher rate of compliance from all retailers.

The compliance checks required by Synar have teenage operatives attempt to purchase tobacco in a random sample of each state's retailers. Each state must meet a minimum 80 percent compliance during these annual inspections. Washington is one of only four states that have met this requirement since 1993. That figure is more than just a good track record. If Washington doesn't meet 80 percent compliance the consequence is losing up to 40 percent of federal substance abuse and treatment block grant funds, amounting to more than \$14 million.

In addition to compliance checks, each year the Tobacco Prevention Program targets at least 200 retailers to receive education-only visits. Education visits cover specific skills to help make retailers more compliant, including effective ways to check IDs and refuse sales to minors.

The Tobacco Prevention Program of Public Health - Seattle & King County remains committed to meeting the Synar requirement and, ultimately, to



reducing youth access to tobacco products. The program will continue to conduct education and enforcement visits throughout the County in 2009.

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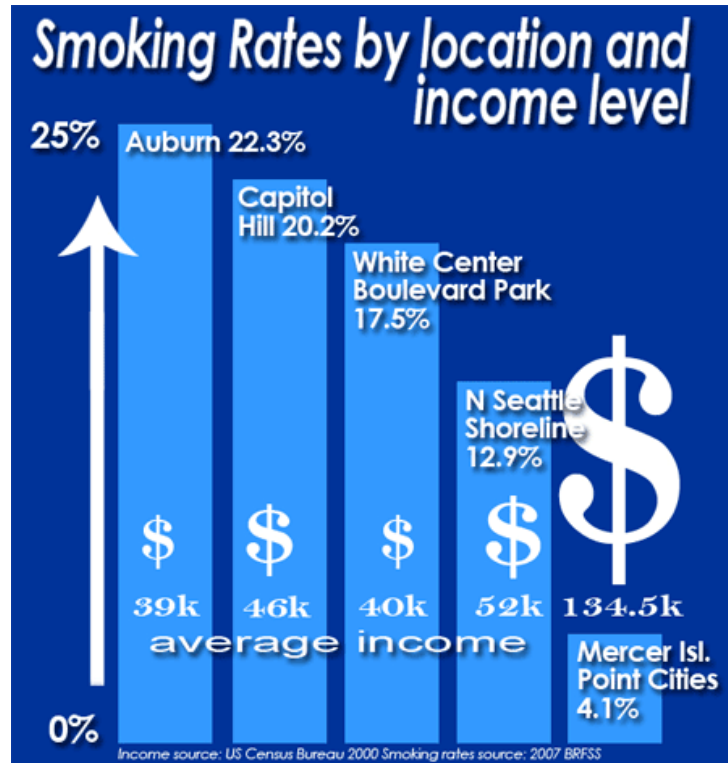
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by Paul Zemann

This session the Washington State Legislature will consider multiple bills that could strengthen tobacco control and prevention in King County and the state. The Tobacco Prevention Program is providing expert testimony in Olympia on several of the bills and providing support for others about Washington's most urban county. Here is a look at the docket and how the program is considering each bill:

Bill Number*	Description and TPP Analysis and Action
HB 1249/ SB 5340	<b>Restricts some internet and mail order sales of tobacco products.</b> Youth are easily able to purchase tobacco online, and are more likely to do so when it is difficult to obtain tobacco elsewhere. In order to keep prevention of youth access to tobacco comprehensive, the legislature needs to close this

The surprising relationship between smoking rates and income levels.

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avenue of access. However, a bill that does not include cigars, which are growing in popularity among King County teens, is incomplete. The program has testified on this bill before both the House and Senate committees. We expressed support, conditional on expanding the bill to include all tobacco products.

### SB 5626

*Imposes an additional cigarette tax and provides for distribution of the revenue.*

Increased excise taxes on tobacco decrease tobacco consumption because higher prices motivate adults to quit or cut down and prevent youth from obtaining tobacco. Additionally, revenues from this bill would sustain funding for tobacco control and provide funding for other cancer reduction programs. The program will provide testimony in support of this bill if and when it moves to committee.

### HB 1435/ SB 5366

*Modifies license provisions for cigarettes and tobacco products.*

The program supports this bill proposed by the Washington State Liquor Control Board. The bill switches the administration of tobacco licenses from the Department of Revenue to the Liquor Control Board, which will increase monitoring of applications to make sure individuals with prior violations – for instance, sales to minors – can not obtain new licenses by changing their business name.

### HB 1151

*Prohibits smoking in vehicles containing children under the age of 18.*

With Washington's Smoking in Public Places law, homes and cars are the biggest areas of exposure to secondhand smoke in the state. The program supports this bill as it would reduce youth exposure to secondhand smoke and reduce consumption of cigarettes.

*\*HB-House Bill, SB-Senate Bill*

For the latest information on these and other bills in the state legislature, visit <http://apps.leg.wa.gov/billinfo>.